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This passage occurs the same day as the resurrection – only later in the day. It is not clear who the disciples are who are in the room as they are not named. There are almost 3 distinct sections to this passage – the first when Jesus shows up the first time, the second when he shows up to see Thomas and the third which is the last 2 verses. I mention this because it would be unwise for a preacher to try to tackle all 3 sections in one sermon – so I will focus primarily on the first section today. Jesus uses the word “Peace” here 3x – it is the word “Shalom” – which is a deep rich word meaning peace, but more like wholeness, healing, total well-being – spirit mind body.

This passage works more fully if you put yourself in this mindset of the disciples: their leader is gone/dead. They are afraid of being caught and killed because they were his disciples – so they are locked in a room. As you hear this passage, understand and feel their fear.

*John 20:19-31*

*19When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” 20After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. 21Jesus said to them again**, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” 22When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. 23If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.” 24But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. 25So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord.” But he said to them, “Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.”*

*26A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” 27Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.” 28Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!” 29Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.” 30Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. 31But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.*

***Peace***

Okay, let’s visualize for a moment. Relax and think about a time when you were at peace, completely peaceful – just filled with peace – no worries. Feel that for a minute – close your eyes if you choose – go where you need to go. Live into that. What was that like? How did that feel? It is good to be peaceful. It is rich and fulfilling. Satisfying. So let me ask: when you are peaceful do you get more done or less? Are you healthier? Friendlier? Me too. Being peace-filled, peace-full is great a way to live. When I am at peace I am ready for anything.

Sorry to do this to you, but let's try the opposite for a moment. When was the last time you were without peace? What did that feel like? Do you feel it in your body? Isn’t that an awful place to be? Stressful; anti-creative; anti-joyful; anti-social! When you are without peace, what happens? What are your reactions like? Sometimes when we lack peace we are stymied, stuck. We are unable to function – and if we can function, our reactions and our responses are often skewed. Often, when we are lacking that inner peace we react badly. We make bad decisions. We get angry and can hurt people. We yell at our children or our spouses or the guy driving in front of us. When we lack peace we can be destructive – we are not creative and thoughtful. Sometimes when we are without peace we just go and hide – not the positive resting and rejuvenating, but more hiding from responsibilities. We slowly let things fall apart. Have you ever done that? The boss asks you to do something, some project that you are afraid of, and you procrastinate, fall way behind and then get in major trouble?

I believe the folks we met this morning, the disciples we saw today in John’s story, were people without peace. These followers of Jesus were living in fear, without any semblance of peace, mainly because their lives had suddenly been thrown into chaos. Their leader was gone, murdered. And now they feared for their lives. They may very well have been thinking: *“if they killed Jesus, and they know we were with him, then we are next. What do we do, what do we do?”* It needs to be pointed out that these disciples were terrified – the Greek word use here and translated “fear” is  (phobos) which has the meaning of not just fear, but *dread, terror, strong feelings of anxiety*. These folks were absolutely petrified. And their fear had taken away their inner peace and had rendered them unable to do anything. They were stuck. So, they chose to hide. They stopped all their activity and hid in that room. I am not judging them here – let me be clear about that. I would have done the same thing.

Then, so beautifully, into this scene of terror and shame walks Jesus. He entered that room, filled with his friends, all of whom had deserted him and left him to die on the cross; all of whom were hiding in this room – and he says to them – *“what in the name of God are you doing here? Why are hiding and whimpering in this room? I’m disgusted with you all!!”* No, that's not what he says. He walks in and the very first thing he says is “Shalom” or in the Greek  *“Peace to you all.”* In this statement, for emphasis, Jesus does not use a verb. All he says is *“Peace to You All”.* The way it is in the Greek is a command – in other words this is a gift from Jesus – and he is almost requiring it of them – almost forcing it into them. He needs them to have this peace.

And what he is giving them is something extraordinary. I hear him saying to them: *“Peace to you. This is my gift to you. Friends, in the midst of all you are feeling, the fear, the dread, the turmoil, everything, I grant you Peace. I am covering you in my Peace. It is yours. Do not be afraid any longer, but be encouraged.”* He is giving them just what they needed. Isn’t that just like Jesus? And this peace Jesus is giving them is beyond anything you can dream of when you think of Peace. This peace is different and unique because it comes from the Resurrected One. Just think about that. This peace comes from the One who was tortured and humiliated and murdered. This gift of Peace Jesus gives them comes from a place of deep experience and incredible power. Remember at the beginning of our time together, you thought about a time when you were totally peaceful? Well this is like that but perhaps more. This peace,  or “Shalom” is a peace that encompasses the whole person. It is about a state of harmony, health, welfare; it is peace between individuals. It is security, safety, and assuredness. It is love worked out in a way that creates joy. And Jesus came to those folks in that room – his people – and gave that to them – and made sure they **knew** they had it, because he said it to them three times. Whenever something is said or done three times in the Bible, remember it, because it is important. So, Jesus giving these folks this peace is critical. This is a Peace that can overcome any emotion, not just fear.

Now, the question is why did he give them this Peace? I’m sure to some degree it was because he cared for them – he wanted them to participate in his Kingdom’s peace. But I believe another answer as to why he gives them peace this day is in verses 21-22 when he says: *“Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you. When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit.”* So, what did he do there? He gave them peace, and then he commissioned them, then he empowers them by breathing the Holy Spirit into them. Again, in this post resurrection situation, Jesus appears to his disciples and

heals them with peace,

commissions them to go do his work and

empowers them with the Holy Spirit to go and do it.

And why does he do all this? Because Jesus knows that the people of the world need healing – because Jesus knows that the people of the world need to hear the Good News of God’s love and having God’s presence in their lives. Knowing all this, Jesus takes the people he has trained and taught and gets them fully prepared to go and heal the people of the world. Which they will do.

And guess what Ogden Presbyterian?

**You** are those disciples now.

**You** are the ones being:

healed,

commissioned

empowered

in order to go out into the world and bring healing, God’s love, and God’s presence. It’s **your** turn now.

To me, doing that work fully and joyfully is our best response the resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is very easy to let the resurrection be simply one day of joy and celebration – then never look back at it. But that cannot be the case – that is not the truth of the resurrection. The resurrection is an event; but it is a lifestyle. The resurrection is a way of living – a way of being in the world. The resurrection must continue every day for us – I wrote a poem about this Monday – it is on our website if you would like to read it (<http://www.ogdenpresbyterian.org/pastors-page.html>). We need to stay focused on living the resurrection each day as followers, Talmidim of Jesus, by doing his work in the world. For Ogden Presbyterian that involves a few things – we have started to get involved with the folks at Homesteads for Hope over on Manitou Rd. We are involved with the Veterans down the street. We are figuring out our role with the farm workers. And we continue to look for ways to minister your adult children. And as always, there are the daily interactions we have with the folks we meet in our regular routines. Those folks need to experience God’s love through you as well.

So, sisters and brothers, please be in prayer about where God needs you in all of this. There is a role for everyone – regardless of what you think you have to offer. There is an important role for each of you. If you are not sure what that role is, be in prayer and be in conversation – with me or Carol Quinn from the Mission Committee or anyone from Session. This is our next step as we grow as disciples of Jesus.

And now sisters and brothers,

I grant you the peace of Christ

I commission you to go as Jesus went

I pray that you be empowered as you are filled with the Holy Spirit

who strengthens us for the work ahead. We must go – the world needs God and God’s love and hope. We must live the power and hope of the resurrection everyday of our lives. And you are the holders and bearers of that love and hope.

Be not afraid – go.

Thanks be to God.

Amen.